

HENFIELD COMMONS JOINT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Henfield Commons Joint Committee held on **Thursday 24th March 2022** at **2pm** in the Henfield Main Hall.

PRESENT: Mr A Sharp (Chairman) Mr M Morgan
Mr J Potts Mr R Noel
Ms G Perry Mr E Colgate

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms V Wise (Horsham District Council)
Mr P Crawford (Horsham District Council)
Ms J Coultas
Mr J Dane

ITEM DESCRIPTION

1. DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS INTERESTS

There were no Declarations

2. CONFIRMATION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman explained that when Mr Morgan was proposed as Vice Chairman at a recent meeting he was seconded by Ms Perry who is not a voting member so was not valid. He was then seconded by Mr Potts and Mr Morgan was confirmed as Vice Chairman,

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE 6th OCTOBER 2021

These were approved by the meeting and the Chairman will sign these at a later date.

4. APOLOGIES

Mrs E Goodyear, Mr T Baker, Mr C Simmonds.

5. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman said the Adur Valley District Scouts would like to hold a march and jamboree on St. George`s Day, the 23rd April, with approximately 600 beavers, cubs and Scouts who will gather outside the Hall and march to Henfield Common and would be on the funfair site from 11am to 5pm. He has spoken to one of the organisers who said they would bring in portaloos etc. Mr Morgan said they should approach the District Council regarding closing the road, Ms Wise added there is a long lead in and they should be contacted very soon. The Chairman did not wish to charge a fee although if they needed the grass cut then they would be charged this. He will confirm this with the Scouts.

The Chairman had introduced Ms Wise as Head of Leisure and Culture and invited her to address the meeting. She said she offered her help in various ways to this committee. Mr Crawford had attended our meetings and knows how we work and the Chairman felt we work well. Mr Morgan explained there were originally 2 District Councillors on the committee and when boundaries changed we acquired another one.

He added that the previous Parks & Countryside Officer would come down to some meetings and help with advice and problems although we had this help and advice we had never had an offer like Ms Wise offered and that although we are a sub-committee of the District Council we usually operated on our own. Ms Wise said the Management Plan ideals need to be funded but did not want to tread on any toes, the Chairman said he thinks the Commons almost run themselves although Mr Morgan said sometimes this may not be such a good idea.

Ms Perry commented on Horsham District Council's management of their sites and said there are now conservation groups and volunteers, Ms Wise advised caution regarding having too many volunteers or "Friends of ..."

Mr Noel said we have some big capital projects that we should be dealing with and suggested the District Council deal with standard maintenance such as grass cutting, strimming etc which would give this committee time to consider other projects, e.g. Broadmare Common, reed bed etc although the Chairman had to disagree as he thought it would be problematic dealing with contractors other than our own. Further discussion took place regarding this with the Chairman reminding the meeting that our grass cutting contractor is from Henfield and knows all the Commons and Tanyard. Mr Crawford said his grounds maintenance contractors could be used. Mr Morgan said we are the end of our current contract which the Clerk confirmed that we do need to go out to tender with Mr Crawford saying our schedule could be absorbed into theirs.

OPEN FORUM

None

6. HENFIELD COMMON

(i) Management Plan

Planned work on the reed bed did not proceed as we did not get our grant from Wilder Horsham and though the contractor offered to split the cost between this budget year and the next, Horsham District Council could not agree this before the payment cut off.

Mr Morgan said the digging out of the reed bed is within the Management Plan and to lower it, it is now drying out and the easement monies should be used for capital projects and Mr Noel said last year the reed bed has been inspected and now the willows are much larger and asked why we should not do this before they get worse. Mr Morgan said we could dig out the willows and then lower the reed bed with the monies. Mr Colgate said he was alarmed regarding growth of the willows and something needs to be done and agreed with Mr Noel that costs will continue to rise. The Chairman said this is a big project and it should be considered further and that some willows have been removed. Mr Morgan said something should be done this autumn and Mr Noel agreed it should be no later. The Chairman said we should come up with a plan and Mr Crawford said he would look at further contractors who could indicate any problems.

It was agreed to add remedial work to the reed bed on an Action Plan.

Ms Wise left the meeting at 3pm.

The Chairman said that the proposed action under the Management Plan for this year was to create a new scallop off the western edge of Swains path. He felt this could be done safely by the Conservation Group and will discuss it with Mr. Baker.

(ii) Mowing regime

.The Chairman agreed with the Management Plan that the best way of preserving flora diversity was cattle grazing as this creates a patchwork of micro climates. However it would be at least four years, if ever, before cattle arrived on the Common, so we should have a cutting regime that gave as many micro climates as possible. Discussion took place regarding other grazing animals although the Chairman said heavier animals were needed to rip up tufts of grass and for their hooves to sink into the ground creating micro climates.

Mr Crawford said if using cattle and fences then there has to be consultations/referendums with the village with community engagement being presented to the Secretary of State and that Kate Ryland is right that this is problematic with it being a registered Common. Ms Coultas had doubts but after meeting Kate had been won over using cattle, she had taken the idea of cattle to a local meeting and every one was very positive. A member of the public asked about temporary fencing but the Chairman said linked fencing would not hold charging cattle if startled. He would also like the bund cut reduced to increase diversity although Mr. Morgan felt the public would complain.

The cutting regime proposed is:

- . cut and remove hay once or twice a year leaving 1 to 2 metres uncut around the edges
- . in future years cut a quarter of the edges each year
- . cut back the reed bed`s western edge by about 5 metres and hand remove the cut reeds
- . bash the bracken fiddleheads on the south side of the Common as they appear
- . cut the bund only once or twice a year.

This regime was agreed by the meeting.

Mr Noel said we should consult the public regarding what we are doing regarding the reed bed, bund, leaving borders etc. Mr. Morgan said we should put out an article and see what the reaction is, which the meeting agreed with. Mr Noel recommended a referendum on grazing before we cut any further with stock fencing being hidden behind the bund, Mr Crawford said he will look into the situation. Mr. Crawford said there is a blue heart scheme whereby information is placed on a sign that this is a nature verge.

Mr Colgate asked how many Dexter cattle could be on the Common and Mr Crawford said if all year round then the area would be very big.

(iii) Parking at the entrance to Henfield Common North

Mr Dane said there is an area regularly used for parking with cars making the road narrow creating access problems together with deep furrows following wet weather and suggested placing posts, Mr Morgan also proposed signs stating no parking particularly on the verges. Ms Coultas was concerned regarding possible future accidents relating to visibility. It was agreed to try posts deterring parking but any signs erected by residents need to be agreed by the committee, any signs would be borne at the cost to residents although it was possible we would make a contribution.

Mr Dane also asked if yellow hatching could be painted at the entrance to Daisycroft and the Chairman agreed to this to deter parking. Ms Coultas was concerned regarding wooden blocks outside some properties to deter parking or crossing the verges which are mown by residents. No action was proposed on this but it was agreed that the residents could repair, at their expense, the yellow crosshatch and signs at the start of Henfield Common North.

The Chairman indicated the Memorial Field is still wet. The contractor had proposed a number of possible options. One was to get a digger in to clear the ditch at the northern edge. The Chairman opposed this as it risk damaging the trees` valuable aesthetically and as a home for a variety of lichen and that it would not dry out the field.

Ms Coultas wanted clarification regarding the Bye-Laws regarding horse riding and quoted from a Horse Society document and whilst appreciated the committee`s efforts regarding the horse trail would also like to use the rest of the common. Ms Perry felt the Bye-Laws can be opaque and may need clarification. Mr Colgate cited an incident with a child and horse rider which became upset with the horse kicking out at the child causing life changing injuries and that things with horses can happen very quickly and felt horses should be restricted on the common.

Ms Coultas left the meeting at 4.10pm

7. BROADMARE COMMON

The Chairman said he would like a Management Plan carried out this year and will ask Sussex Wildlife Trust to recommend an appropriate person, Mr Morgan would like to know the cost. Mr Crawford said if this committee does not have enough budget to carry out all the tasks then we should approach the District Council and that he will arrange with Jake Everitt to visit the common.

Mr Morgan left the meeting at 4.15pm

8. OREHAM COMMON

There was nothing to report.

9. TANYARD

The Chairman said there was still a problem with Chestnut End and that added the contractor who looks after the Tanyard takes pride in his work.

10. FINANCE

The Clerk had previously circulated the end of year breakdown of expenditure and spreadsheet

11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

12 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 4.20pm.